

The Trojan Horse Diet

What if some of the “healthy” foods you’re eating are doing you the most harm?

We owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Weston A. Price for his contribution to the study of human nutrition. Dr. Price was a dentist who in the 1930s and 1940s traveled to remote areas of the globe and discovered key principles about traditional diets. As a dentist, Dr. Price was principally concerned with the connection between diet and dental health. What he uncovered was the connection between the increasing industrialization of the food supply and the physical degeneration of the populations who consumed this food, manifested in rampant tooth decay, narrowed jaws and crooked teeth (which he called “dental deformation”) in the next generation.

Accompanied by his wife and the occasional guide, Dr. Price traveled from isolated villages nestled in the Swiss Alps, to hardy communities of Eskimos in the wilderness of Alaska. In Polynesia, Africa, Australia and many other out-of-the way communities, he discovered the same connection between food and health. In a general sense, his discovery can be summed up quite simply. When isolated people adhere to their traditional diets, their health and quality of life are far better than after adopting a modern diet high in refined grains, sugar and other processed foods. The problem gets worse with succeeding generations that grow up on a modern diet. They experience advanced tooth decay, physical deformities (which first manifest as narrow dental pallets and crooked

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teeth), a loss of overall vigor, decreased resistance to disease and a lower quality of life. Dr. Price documented his research in his life-changing book, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*, a stunning account—in words and pictures—of what happens when diet goes awry.

A key finding of his research was that foods like liver, organ meats, fish eggs, fish liver oil, and eggs and butter from pastured animals, foods containing high levels of vitamins A and D, and were consumed in large amounts by healthy non-industrialized peoples; in fact, they valued these foods as sacred, especially for pregnant women and growing children. These life-giving foods are the very foods now condemned by the diet priesthood.

The physical degeneration that Dr. Price observed in the first half of the last century began with the advent of processed food and continues to the present. In fact, the chronic diseases associated with civilization—heart disease, diabetes, obesity and cancer—plague us even more greatly today, despite our advanced knowledge of human physiology and the slew of drugs and treatments we use to control them. This rise in chronic disease exactly parallels the increasing industrialization of our food supply.

Of course, environmental pollutants and destructive choices of lifestyle also contribute to our declining health, but the foods we eat, the foods that literally become a part of us, are the primary contributors to the breakdown of the human body. Our modern diet of processed, easy-open, labor-saving, pre-cooked, just-add-water, fat-free convenience foods seem like a huge step forward. We have been freed from the “tyranny” of cooking, but at what price?

FACTORY FARMS

In 1906, American writer Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle*, a scathing exposé of the American meat-packing industry. Sinclair’s vivid portrayal of unsanitary and morally bankrupt slaughterhouse practices brought about sweeping changes within the meat industry. We can all breathe easier now knowing that the corrupt practices of early twentieth century America are behind us—or can we?

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Our meat is more regulated and presumably cleaner today than it was in Sinclair's era, but what do we really know about where our food comes from? Advertisements for dairy products show contented cows lolling in verdant fields of beneath tranquil skies. Promotions for meat products often avoid showing the actual animals, lest we accidentally make the connection between that cute calf or pig and the pork chop or slice of veal on our dinner plate. For several generations now, we have been literally and figuratively cut off from our food, but as we have seen, it wasn't always that way.

The truth is, today's factory farms engage in practices similar to those Upton Sinclair wrote about. Dairy cows are held in confinement conditions and forced to stand on concrete floors their whole lives. They live in cathedral-sized metal sheds that enshrine man's inhumanity to animals. To keep the milk flowing, these animals receive an unnatural diet of grain, soy, bakery waste and swill from ethanol production. The cows have been selectively bred to have enormous udders; they deliver far more milk than Mother Nature ever intended. On some farms, growth hormones like BST (bovine somatotropin) are used to stimulate higher levels of milk production. Not surprisingly, these animals often get sick and are kept "productive" courtesy of a strenuous course of antibiotics. One particularly nasty illness called mastitis, an infection of the udder, is pandemic in confinement dairies. The infected animal may secrete pus into her milk, resulting in a sub-standard product that must be filtered and pasteurized before your child can drink it with any assurance of safety.

Pigs and chickens have not been excluded from the misery. Pigs are held in conditions so stressful and crowded that they engage in the practice of chewing each other's tails. Industry's response to this problem is not to reduce the number of pigs on a farm, or increase the acreage to accommodate them, but to chop off their tails! Meanwhile, biochemists are trying to breed the stress gene out of the pigs so that they'll suffer their fate without resistance.

Industrial agriculture has turned chickens into egg and meat machines, confined in cages with barely enough room for them to move

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around. The taste of chicken today can't compare to the taste I recall as a child. In those days, the meat was firm and flavorful and the bones quite hard. Today, meat from grocery store chickens is distastefully mealy, and the bones are soft. The commercial eggs have pale anemic yolks, inferior in taste to the delicious, deep yellow yolks from pastured chickens on a more natural diet.

Besides the illness and stress these animals suffer, the humans who live with and near them must deal with another problem: what to do with all the waste? As you might imagine, the accumulated waste produced by too many animals in too small a space produces smells so bad it makes people sick. The waste is held in onsite containment ponds. A recent news article describes how the wall of a containment pond gave way, causing a massive spill. Thousands of gallons of putrid sludge poured into a drainage ditch and eventually made its way into a nearby river, killing thousands of fish.

Factory farming taints everything it touches: animals, farm workers, environment, food, and those who consume it.

THE MODERN TRADITIONAL DIET

The healthy indigenous people that Dr. Price studied consumed a traditional diet devoid of refined and processed food. What constitutes a traditional diet? Today, many children begin their lives on soymilk before graduating to soda, sometimes while they're still on the bottle. A traditional diet does not necessarily refer, then, to the first food you eat. To understand what is meant by a traditional diet, we must first define the word "food." Eating wisely requires us to know what is in our food and what effect it will have on our long-term health. We also need to distinguish between "food" and "real food." Generally speaking, most people define food as anything we eat for nourishment, energy or the simple desire to satisfy our hunger. This is a broad definition, as you'll see, because people are remarkably adaptable with regard to what they'll eat.

I knew a kid in grade school who was particularly fond of that white crafts paste we used in school. He would snatch great gobs of the

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stuff and eat it surreptitiously when the teacher wasn't looking. In some parts of the world, eating dirt is not uncommon. Some people have even been known to consume objects like nuts and bolts. Most of us would not consider paste or a three-quarter inch lug nut as food, so let's refine our definition a bit more.

Food is any edible substance from a natural plant or animal source consumed for the purpose of providing nourishment and energy. This is a better description, but let's examine it further. *Real* food is food that has been minimally processed and retains its natural life-giving properties.

Most of the added ingredients in today's food are unnecessary for human nourishment. In some cases, they may even be harmful. These additives exist for three reasons, none of which has anything to do with nourishing the human body. The first is to mimic freshness by artificially extending the shelf life of the food. Without these additives, many foods would quickly go stale and rot. The second reason is that many commercially produced foods simply don't taste very good, so additives are used to enhance flavor as well as visual appeal. The third is that manufacturers are always looking for ways to cut costs and increase profits.

Artificial food additives reduce cost by replacing real ingredients with fake ones. Generally speaking, the fewer additives and preservatives a food contains, the more real it is.

The way foods are produced also determines how real they are. Beef from a cow that has been raised in abusive conditions on a diet of grains, growth hormones and antibiotics is not the same as beef from a healthy grass-fed cow. Packaged foods that have been sterilized, synthesized, homogenized, colorized, pasteurized, emulsified, flavored, pulverized, deodorized, irradiated and genetically modified do not qualify as real food. Artificially flavored and colored "yogurt" that does not require refrigeration and comes in a squeezable tube is an extreme example of this type of not-real food. "Beef" ribs made from soy is another.

Manufacturers are the primary beneficiaries of this type of not-real food production. Consumers lose because eating substances that

are foreign and possibly harmful to the human body, and produced in a manner inconsistent with good nutrition, leads to the ruin of our health.

Real food, then, can be defined as food that contains few or no additives or artificial ingredients. Real food nourishes, builds and energizes the body and is produced in a manner consistent with retaining the life-giving properties of the food. Everything from salads to pizza made from real ingredients qualifies as real food. These are the traditional foods that have nourished humanity down through the ages. It follows, then, that a traditional diet is one comprised of real foods that are in harmony with the evolutionary physiology of the human body.

A DIETARY ODYSSEY

Two of my favorite stories growing up were Homer’s twin epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They tell the story of the long Trojan War, and of the Greek hero Odysseus’ even longer journey home. I was especially fascinated by the Trojan horse, a “gift” from the Greeks that turned out to be the instrument of the Trojans’ defeat. Today, poor dietary advice has turned out to be a Trojan horse in the lives of many unsuspecting people. For decades, we have been at war with our cultural and culinary history, traditional foods and, in particular, dietary fats. Fat, especially saturated fat, has been the scapegoat for all that is wrong with what America eats. The oft repeated warning to “eat lowfat,” has become more than just a cornerstone of nutritional dogma—it has become sacred scripture, constantly preached by the diet priesthood to millions of faithful adherents.

We have adopted a nutritional belief system that demonizes fat with the fervor of religious zealotry. It is a faith we practice daily, making fat-free food choices with a numbing sense of duty, one that approaches fundamentalist fanaticism. We have been taught that salvation and thin thighs can only be attained by a strict adherence to a fat-free lifestyle, and so, without question, we blindly sacrifice our bodies, our minds—and our children—to this belief.

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Yet despite an almost universal belief in lowfat dieting, most of us end up with weight gain, illness and premature death. Although obesity, heart disease, diabetes, allergies, asthma and fatigue befall us anyway, we soldier on, obediently invoking protection against the evil of dietary fat, while we medicate ourselves into oblivion.

WHAT ARE WE REALLY EATING?

The image of Americans as lazy gluttons stuffing themselves with prodigious amounts of dietary animal fat is a gross exaggeration. The following statistics from the *USDA Food Consumption, Prices, and Expenditures* report reveals what Americans really eat. Except where noted, the report covers the period between 1970 and 1997.

Although per capita consumption of meat of all types reached near record high levels in 1994, the proportion of fat from meat declined from thirty-five percent in 1970 to twenty-five percent in 1994. Saturated fat consumption fell from thirty-seven percent to twenty-six percent. In 1960, beef producers began raising leaner beef by moving away from the traditionally fatter and tastier breeds, like Herefords and Angus. The trends are similar for pork. While overall consumption increased slightly from 1970 to 1998, the meat was much leaner, reflecting consumer trends toward lowfat eating. In all, per capita meat consumption, including red meat, poultry and fish, was up about thirteen pounds per year, but this change was due mostly to an increase in poultry consumption. Consumption of red meat, which was significantly leaner and contained much less saturated fat, actually declined.

During this period, shell eggs, once considered a perfect food, saw a per capita decline from two hundred seventy-six to one hundred seventy-three eggs per year, due to consumer fear of cholesterol. Between 1970 and 1994, daily consumption of cholesterol declined thirteen percent, from four hundred seventy to four hundred ten milligrams per day. Yet heart disease remains at epidemic levels.

In the dairy category, whole milk consumption decreased by two-thirds between 1970 and 1997. This decrease was offset by America's

love affair with cheese and fluid cream products. Average consumption of cheese increased one hundred forty-six percent! Lest you think Americans inexplicably evolved into connoisseurs of fine gourmet cheeses, think again. Most of that cheese—up to two-thirds—came packaged as convenience food in the form of pizza, snack foods, fast food sandwiches, chips, bagel spreads, etc. While cheese is a high-fat item, when it comes as convenience food it is accompanied by prodigious amounts of grains, sugars and processed vegetable oils.

Consumption of fluid cream products increased from just under ten half-pints to seventeen half-pints, usually in the form of ice cream and dips, while overall fluid butterfat consumption (in whole and reduced-fat milk and cream) declined by thirty-seven percent.

Surprisingly, in 1997 Americans on average consumed fifty-seven pounds more fruit and eighty-seven pounds more vegetables than in 1970. Given all the finger wagging from health experts, you would never guess that produce consumption has risen so much.

The most startling figures in the USDA report come in the categories of grain, sugar and “fat and oils.” American consumption of flour and cereal products increased from one hundred thirty-six pounds in 1970 to a whopping two hundred pounds in 1997. That’s a lot of dough. Much of this increase came in the form of fast food and snack food such as pizza, pasta, crackers, chips and—the mother of all grain foods—ready-to-eat cereals. Breakfast cereal consumption between 1980 and 1997 increased by forty-one percent to seventeen pounds per person per year! Much of that cereal was consumed with mounds of sugar. In fact, in 1997, our consumption of sugars—table sugar and high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS)—rose twenty-eight percent, or thirty-four pounds per person, to a total of one hundred fifty-four pounds of the sweet stuff. That’s fifty-three teaspoons—almost two cups—per day! A far cry from the six to eighteen teaspoons (based on a diet of sixteen hundred to twenty-eight hundred calories) our government recommends in the Food Guide Pyramid. The use of corn sweeteners, especially HFCS, skyrocketed due to favorable government agricultural policies toward corn growers and an overabundant supply.

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One place these corn sweeteners wound up in was beverages. In 1986, the average American swilled twenty-eight gallons of carbonated soda. By 1997, that number had increased to forty-one gallons, a forty-seven percent increase. Soda has replaced milk as the drink—or drug—of choice among children and teenagers.

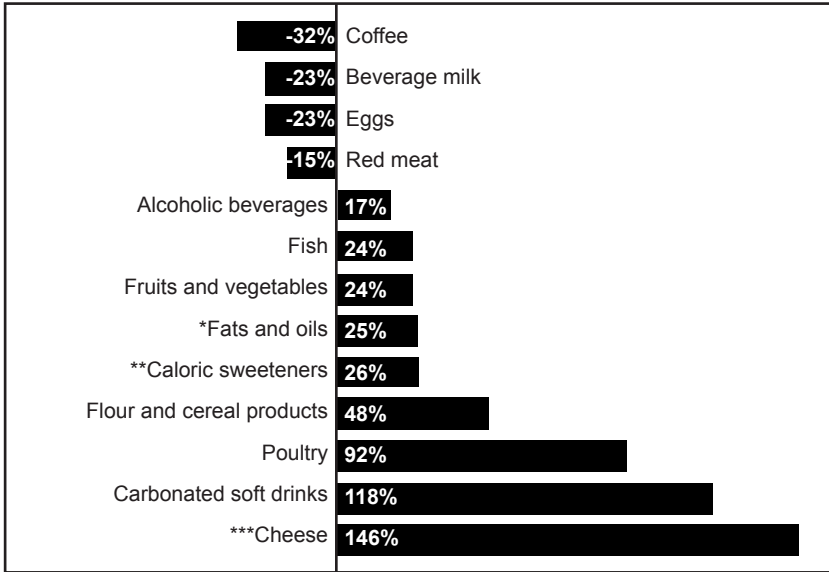
Finally, let's look at fats and oils. Unless you live in some kind of lumberjack commune or South Sea island, it's unlikely that you know anyone who cooks with lard, tallow, coconut or palm oil. Even the use of butter is a rarity today. Between 1970 and 1997, consumption of animal fats declined by a fourth while consumption of polyunsaturated vegetable fats increased by two-fifths. During this same period, consumption of polyunsaturated salad and cooking oils jumped from fifteen to twenty-nine pounds per capita!

Experts like Mary Enig, PhD, have warned the public about the fact that polyunsaturated vegetable oils can become oxidized quite easily, forming free radicals that cause cancer and atherosclerosis in humans. Unfortunately, since the 1950s, health “experts” have been advising us to consume polyunsaturated oils as a preventative measure against heart disease and cancer. These rancid oils are, in fact, more likely to create health problems than prevent them. Government policy also promotes the consumption of partially hydrogenated vegetable fats, which are engineered to behave like saturated fat. These products, in the form of margarine and shortening, are loaded with harmful trans fats. Baked goods—including cookies, cakes and crackers—peanut butter, fried foods, soups and cereals are all loaded with trans fats. Commercial salad dressings contain both liquid oils and partially hydrogenated oils. We eat far more of these dressings today than we did thirty years ago because we are following the advice to eat more salads! A USDA survey showed that between 1989 and 1991, the average woman between the ages of nineteen and fifty obtained more vegetable fat from salad dressing than anything else she was eating.

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Changes in U.S. Per Capita Food Consumption, 1970 - 1997



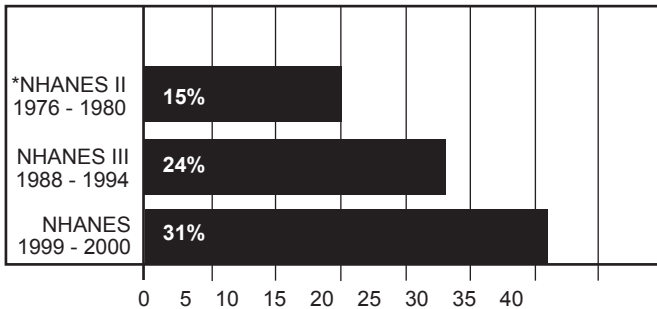
Source: *USDA Economic Research Service*

* Represents added fats and oils (shortening, margarine, vegetable oil, butter) found in fried foods, snack foods and salad dressing. Excludes natural fats found in foods like milk and meat. By 1994, these fats and oils contributed to 52% of total fat intake. Meat, fish, and poultry followed with 25% of the total.

** Includes caloric sweeteners used in soft drinks.

*** Two-thirds of cheese consumption came in the form of prepared foods.

Trends in Obesity from 1976 - 2000



Source: Derived from the CDC and the National Center for Health Statistics

* National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, age-adjusted by the direct method to U.S. Census Bureau estimates for the year 2000 using the age groups 20-29, 40-59 and 60-74 years.

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OBESITY AND HEART DISEASE

It is interesting to note the changes in the health of Americans over the same time period as the food consumption survey. According to the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey conducted by a division of the Centers for Disease Control, rates of obesity doubled between 1976 and 2000. Heart disease continues as the number one killer in America, racking up almost nine hundred fifty thousand lives in the year 2000, according to the American Heart Association. While the death rate from heart disease has declined slightly due to improvements in treatment, Americans continue to be stricken by this killer in astounding numbers.

When I look at these statistics, I see a reflection of myself. Just like many other Americans, I followed the prevailing health advice. I ate more fruits and vegetables and less fat, and abandoned whole milk and eggs. I substituted poultry cooked in polyunsaturated oils for red meat and replaced butter with margarine. I consumed prodigious amounts of sweetener in soda, fruit juices and just about ninety percent of the convenience foods on my grocery store shelf. I didn't smoke, drink alcohol or consume coffee. In short, I did just about everything the experts said I should, but despite my virtuous life, I still managed to gain over two hundred pounds.

What I didn't know was that the polyunsaturated vegetable oils and partially hydrogenated fats that had replaced the animal fats in my diet were destroying my health. I didn't know that my lowfat diet was actually kindling my appetite to eat more. I never realized that a diet high in grains, sugars and supposedly healthier vegetable oil was actually a Trojan horse, piling on the pounds faster than I could exercise them off. I didn't know that the reason I failed at dieting so often was because the food I ate was grossly insufficient to meet my nutritional needs. I didn't know that bingeing and devouring an entire family-sized bag of potato chips was a sign that my body was craving healthy fat. I didn't know that those late-night eating marathons could have been completely avoided had I simply added a little healthy fat in the form of a steak, some coconut oil

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or butter to my diet. In the end, I didn't know that my inability to exercise regularly had more to do with a series of diets insufficient to sustain me physically and mentally. There was a lot I didn't know, and apparently none of my doctors knew anything either.

Dietary animal fat has been pegged as the primary culprit in the long-running siege against our health. However, when you review the USDA statistics, you can see that while consumption of saturated fat has decreased overall, consumption of processed convenience foods has increased dramatically. Is it really that difficult to see the connection between these so-called foods and the increase in heart disease, obesity and diabetes?

It is a well-established fact that obesity is a risk factor for heart disease. When many consumers began to reduce their intake of sweeteners and grains, our government sponsored a number of studies intended to refute low-carb dieting. Instead, these studies proved the connection between excess refined carbohydrates and obesity. Is it not reasonable to suggest that heart disease, which correlates with obesity, may be connected to the excess starches and sugars found in processed foods? Why then is the scientific community still obsessed with saturated fats?

I don't mean to suggest that the Western diet is the sole cause of heart disease. Smoking, stress and physical inactivity play key roles as well. What I do say is that much evidence exists to challenge the theory that cholesterol and saturated fat cause heart disease. So much evidence, in fact, that one begins to wonder where, exactly, the science behind the theory can be found? It almost seems as though the proponents of the diet-heart hypothesis are operating more on their personal faith in the theory than on scientific fact. Despite their protestations in favor of "sound science," they are more like faith healers than scientists.

As the truth about dietary fat emerges, and we begin to reapply the wisdom of our ancestors, we can celebrate a long-awaited homecoming. Like Odysseus, the road home to wellness may be long and difficult, but Odysseus finally made it. I found that once I mustered the courage to plot my own course home, I could make it, too.

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THE DIETARY DARK AGES

For the last few decades, I've lived through a personal and public dark age of nutrition and health—and have witnessed a steady increase in obesity, in adult disorders afflicting children and in unexplained cancers. The answer to the question, “How did this happen?” was not easy for me to accept. I had to let go of much of what I thought I knew about nutrition, exercise and public health policy. I had to open my mind to some old and new ideas.

The good news is that Mary and I discovered that the story of our lives did not have to follow the modern script. Even better was the news that you don't have to be an expert to change your life and improve your health. We did just that, losing a combined two hundred-plus pounds without doctors, drugs, dieting or surgery. The best news of all was that losing weight was just the beginning of a physical and mental transformation, one that changed the way we saw the world and ourselves.

But before I tell you about how we changed the direction of our future, I have to tell you how we put the breaks on our past. The amazing fact is that I owe this life-changing experience, this personal reclamation, to an order of take-out chicken.